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SUBJECT: IRAQIS IN JORDAN SHOW LITTLE INTEREST IN RETURNING HOME, WHILE STILL MORE ARRIVE

REF: AMMAN 199

Classified By: CDA David Hale, per 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary and comment: A range of embassy contacts report that Iraqis continue to seek refuge in Jordan, with only limited returns from Iraq to Jordan. The handful of voluntary returns in the last six months was limited to new caseload refugees or individuals with particular reasons to return to Iraq. The new Iraqi arrivals represent a broad range of Iraqi society and include some who came to Jordan in search of humanitarian assistance, and others who fear retribution. NGO contacts report that old caseload Iraqis have exhausted their financial resources, while their employment opportunities have become more limited. UNHCR acknowledges it has little knowledge of its potential volrep caseload and has commissioned a profile of the extremely vulnerable Iraqi population. While some Iraqis and NGOs report some pressure on the Iraqi population, the presence of a large Iraqi community has yet to become an overt political issue in Jordan. Consequently, the GOJ continues to accept the presence of the estimated 300,000 Iraqis in Jordan and we have no reason to believe it will move toward a premature return. End summary and comment.

Iraqis Continue to Arrive at Steady Pace

2. (SBU) Jordanian, Iraqi, UN and NGO officials all report that significant numbers of Iraqis continue to seek refuge in Jordan. While the GOJ has not provided precise figures of new arrivals, anecdotal evidence indicates that Iraqis from across the socio-economic spectrum continue to seek temporary safety in Jordan. Ahmad Jiralla Al-Dabbagh, the Consul General at the Iraqi Mission in Amman, told PolOff that the flow of Iraqis from Iraq to Jordan continues, and that Amman-based Iraqis he's talked to tell him that they are waiting for the security situation to improve and for good job opportunities. Al-Dabbagh added that although many Iraqis in Jordan are eking out a meager existence, many feel they would be worse off if they returned to Iraq now. ICMC Country Representative Clive Cavanagh (who administers a PRM-funded assistance program for the most vulnerable Iraqis) estimates that 30-40 percent of ICMC's current caseload arrived in Jordan after the fall of Saddam's regime. A small number of these new arrivals (Cavanagh estimated 10 to 15 individuals) told ICMC they came to Jordan specifically for the medical assistance offered by ICMC. (Cavanagh refused to provide assistance to these individuals, to avoid creating a pull factor among needy Iraqis inside Iraq.)

3. (C) On the other end of the spectrum, Amman since the summer of 2003 has been awash in late-model luxury sedans with Baghdad license plates, and Jordanians complain that wealthy new Iraqi arrivals have bid up the price of real estate. Local Iraqi churches report an increase in the number of new Christian arrivals from Iraq. Some of these are undoubtedly former supporters of Saddam fearful of retribution in Iraq; others may be simply rich enough to come to Jordan and ride out the present period of uncertainty and instability at home.

GOJ Limiting Entry?

4. (C) Rumors persist that the Jordanian authorities limit entry of Iraqis to those who can prove they have sufficient resources either to support themselves in Jordan or transit to another country. UNHCR staff in Ruweished report that only Iraqis with USD 20,000 in cash or in banks in Jordan are allowed to enter the country. While we have not been able to confirm this report, Embassy Amman's civil-military liaison officer at the Iraqi border reports that an average of 200 persons are denied entry to Jordan every day. The Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) LNO told a member of the Embassy's Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Center (HACC), that while there are no definitive monetary requirements for Iraqis wishing to enter Jordan, they are asked to show evidence of sufficient funds for the stated purpose of their

visit, i.e., vehicle or apartment purchase. UNHCR Representative Sten Bronee worries that these rumors, if true, indicate that the GOJ has a de facto closed border policy in spite of written commitments made to UNHCR to allow all asylum seekers to enter from Iraq. (Comment: The GOJ does seem to have a closed border policy for those asylum seekers it deems risky on either security or overstay grounds.)

While Few Iraqis Choose To Return Home

15. (SBU) UNHCR, NGO and Iraqi embassy officials report that only a limited number of Iraqis have chosen to return home in the last six months. Iraqi Consul Al-Dabbagh told PolOff January 14 that the majority of Iraqi citizens in Jordan -- regardless of socio-economic status -- plan to remain in Jordan until security conditions in Iraq improve. According to UNHCR Senior Protection Officer Jacqueline Parlevliet, only two of the 7,630 Iraqis registered with UNHCR in Jordan have informed UNHCR that they wish to return home. (Those two Iraqis had been accepted for the U.S. refugee resettlement program and decided to return after hearing from PRM refcoords that their cases were not likely to be resolved in the near future.) ICMC Representative Cavanagh reports that only one beneficiary -- a terminally ill cancer patient who wanted to die in Iraq -- had returned home.

16. (SBU) Legal aid NGO Mizan believes many illegal Iraqi residents of Jordan are reluctant to leave Jordan, for fear of losing their ability to return. Under current Jordanian policy, all Iraqis who have overstayed their residency are denied legal re-entry to Jordan. The majority of returnees in the last six months has come from the new caseload, primarily Palestinians who fled Baghdad in April and May of 2003. UNHCR and IOM estimate that roughly 500 of 2,700 new caseload refugees have returned to Iraq. Iraqi Consul Al-Dabbagh told PolOff that he had recently hosted a Danish delegation seeking his input on the repatriation to Iraq of approximately 12,000 Iraqis based in Denmark. The Danes his advice on whether to start repatriating Iraqi asylum-seekers who now had no claim to political asylum. The Iraqi Consul told the Danes that the current unstable situation in Iraq did not bode well for their repatriation and suggested they wait six months and consult with him at that time.

Conditions Worsening
For Vulnerable Iraqis

17. (SBU) UNHCR's NGO implementing partners report that there are some signs of intolerance toward Iraqis in Jordan. According to CARE community service workers, Jordanian authorities have cracked down on illegal Iraqi workers. While downtown Amman used to be full of Iraqi street vendors, according to CARE, the only remaining vendors are women who hide their wares under their hijab at the approach of Jordanian policemen. These women tell CARE workers that their male relatives are unable to find work and spend their days hiding from Jordanian officials. ICMC social workers echo these views, adding that longer-term Iraqi residents seem to have exhausted their savings and are unable to find work. According to ICMC Representative Cavanagh, many Iraqis in Jordan now need assistance with food and shelter, a need that did not exist when ICMC began this project in November 2002. We have also heard anecdotal evidence that some destitute Iraqi women have turned to prostitution.

UNHCR Commissions Profile of Iraqis;
NGOs Urge Creation of Information Centers

18. (SBU) UNHCR acknowledges that it does not have a clear understanding of the Iraqi community in Jordan and has commissioned CARE to conduct a profile of 2,000 vulnerable Iraqis between February and April 2004. UNHCR Representative Bronee told refcoord January 12 that UNHCR lost its primary means of communication with the Iraqi community when it halted refugee status determinations in March 2003 and hopes to reestablish links through the profile. Representatives from CARE and ICMC were quite critical of UNHCR's ability to reach the Iraqi community, telling visiting PRM officers January 19 that UNHCR's low recognition rate (10 percent of all Iraqi applicants) and rumored close links to Saddam's intelligence agents had destroyed all trust of the refugee agency. They urged PRM to fund information centers to spread news about developments in Iraq and collect information about the Iraqi community in Jordan. The very limited UNHCR profiling exercise, they argued, would not be sufficient to capture the full range of the Iraqi community in Jordan.

GOJ Provides Assurances on Temporary Asylum;
Move Toward Premature Return Unlikely

19. (C) In a January 19 meeting with the Iraqi Minister of Displacement and Migration, Jordanian Minister of Interior Habashneh reportedly provided assurances that King Abdullah had instructed the government to maintain the current policy of temporary asylum for Iraqi nationals. These assurances echo statements we have received from other Jordanian officials, including from the Coordinator for UNHCR and Refugee Affairs (ref). Given the long-term nature of the Iraqi population in Jordan, as well as the GOJ's careful scrutiny of the security and overstay risks posed by Iraqis seeking to enter Jordan, we have no reason to believe the GOJ will move toward a premature, forced return of the estimated 300,000 Iraqis resident in Jordan. Further, that the 300,000 Iraqis in Jordan are not centralized and are disbursed throughout Jordan decreases the pressure on the GOJ to push Iraqis back to Iraq.

Comment

10. (SBU) Most Jordanians with whom we speak tend to lump all 300,000 Iraqis in Jordan into one category and consider them all refugees. At the same time, however, most Jordanians understand that security conditions in Iraq will discourage refugee returns in the near term. Since the Iraqi population in Jordan is not concentrated in camps or isolated neighborhoods, Jordanians do not feel on a daily basis the Iraqi community. These two factors should work to put off any Jordanian popular or government pressure to encourage large-scale returns.

11. (U) CPA Baghdad minimize considered.

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